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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/31/2016
TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL GA
SUBJECT: PROMINENT GAMBIAN JOURNALIST RELEASED FROM DETENTION

REF: BANJUL 536

Classified By: PolOff M.M. Nayyar, Reason 14. (b and d)

¶1. (U) Following her arrest by the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) on August 29 (reftel), Amie Sillah, a journalist, campaigner for gender equality, and executive member of a Gambian opposition party, the National Alliance for Democracy and Development (NADD), was released later on the same day. No arrest warrant was presented at the time she was taken into custody and no official reason has been given for her detention.

¶2. (U) Mrs. Sillah's detention coincided with the publication of several newspaper articles broadcasting her support for NADD presidential candidate, Halifa Sallah. In the August 29-30 "Daily Express" newspaper, she was quoted as likening The Gambia to the Titanic, saying that no one escapes the bars of prison in the current political climate. Another piece in the same edition of the "Daily Express" cited Mrs. Sillah's speech at a political rally in the town of Serrekunda, a NADD stronghold. There she reportedly stated that The Gambia is not for sale, referencing an August 28 editorial in the paper "Foroyaa" ("Freedom") that urged civil servants to remain vigilant against pressure from the ruling party, the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC). Mrs. Sillah is a contributor to "Foroyaa," which also ran an article discussing her criticism of the APRC government's failure to solve problems for women as promised.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Although she was held for only a few hours before being released, Mrs. Sillah's detention seems to be developing into a cause celebre for the opposition. It is not likely that Mrs. Sillah will be silenced by her arrest. In fact, if the arrest was intended to silence or send a warning to critics of President Jammeh and his government, the arrest of this well-respected activist may backfire and actually embolden the opposition. END COMMENT.

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